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STATE PASS TO USAID FOR E. LOKEN AND L. DOBBINS
STATE PASS TO NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: 2008 ELECTIONS: STATE OF PLAY

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Glenn Warren. Reason: 1.4 (d)

Summary

[¶1.](#) (C) SADC talks are deadlocked over ZANU-PF's insistence on a March election date and refusal to implement a new constitution before elections. With internal divisions, an uneven electoral playing field, and inadequate time to prepare for elections, the MDC is faced with a Hobson's choice: participate in elections which most party officials believe it will lose, in the process (at least partly) legitimizing a Mugabe victory; or boycott the elections which will result in a Mugabe victory, the absence of an MDC presence in Parliament, and perhaps the end of the MDC as a viable party.

[¶2.](#) (C) ZANU-PF is rife with divisions, and discussions continue regarding formation of a ZANU-PF splinter group to be led by ZANU-PF businessman and Politburo member Simba Makoni, or creation of a popular front, to be led by Makoni, that would combine elements of ZANU-PF (primarily the Mujuru faction) and the MDC. (An alternative scenario involves opposition from a splinter group within the party, but this appears unrealistic.) A coalition could present formidable opposition to Mugabe, but it is unclear that Makoni is willing to participate, that the Mujuru faction will break with ZANU-PF, and that an accommodation could be reached with the MDC, and in particular with Morgan Tsvangirai. Absent such a united opposition, it is almost certain Mugabe will be reelected, and the focus will shift to a Mugabe-orchestrated succession. End Summary

SADC Stalemate

[¶3.](#) (C) According to MDC negotiators Tendai Biti and Welshman

Ncube, the SADC talks are deadlocked over ZANU-PF's insistence that elections occur in March and that implementation of an agreed-upon draft constitution take place after the elections. Biti and Ncube were to have traveled to South Africa this week to meet with their ZANU-PF counterparts and President Thabo Mbeki in a last ditch effort to salvage the talks, but, according to Biti, ZANU-PF is "playing games" and opted out of the trip. Biti told us an effort would be made to reschedule.

14. (C) Ncube stated that ZANU-PF negotiators Chinimasa and Goche had appeared willing to compromise on the issues of the constitution and election date, but had subsequently hardened in their position. He speculated that Mugabe had insisted on hewing to the March election date because he believed the MDC was now weak and additional time might result in a stronger MDC and/or opposition coalition including disaffected ZANU-PF members. A new constitution would present the opportunity for (from Mugabe's point of view) undesirable electoral reforms.

15. (C) Ncube said that Mbeki and SADC had promised a level electoral playing field. To attain this it was crucial that elections be postponed to at least June and that the draft constitution, transferring voter registration from the current partisan registrar and providing for an independent media commission, be implemented. He averred that the MDC would ask Mbeki to request the intervention of the SADC Organ on Defense, Politics, and Security to break the deadlock and, if unsuccessful, to seek a SADC summit.

16. (C) Comment. The MDC entered into the SADC negotiations because it thought it had no alternative. SADC mandated the

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GOZ to participate and the MDC thought it had an opportunity to negotiate--for the first time--directly with ZANU-PF on crucial issues such as a new constitution, repressive legislation, electoral reform, and an improved political environment. As part of the process, and in anticipation of ZANU-PF concessions, the MDC supported Amendment 18 which enlarges the size of Parliament and provides for presidential succession; both of these provisions benefit ZANU-PF and Mugabe. In return, ZANU-PF agreed to minor changes to AIPPA, POSA, the electoral law, and the Broadcasting Act. Significantly, political violence and intimidation have continued. Unless SADC succeeds in a breakthrough on the outstanding issues, the SADC talks will be seen to have advantaged Mugabe and his party while failing in almost every way to achieve the objective of a level playing field. End Comment.

State of the MDC and Election Challenges

17. (C) The MDC has been split since October 2005. While Tsvangirai is well known and remains a popular figure in many

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areas of the country, the party's failure to reunite or form an electoral coalition, combined with its failure until recently to actively campaign, have resulted in decreased support and apathy among potential voters. To be fair, government repression, exemplified by the events of March 11 and the subsequent trashing of MDC offices, has made organization and election preparation difficult. Yet until recently, the MDC had no policy positions and proposals to tell Zimbabweans how an MDC government would be different. The Tsvangirai faction's dissolution of its Women's Assembly in October, resulting in the sidelining of its head, Lucia Matibenga, resulted in divisions within the faction that have not yet healed. And with the apparent breakdown of the SADC talks, many party members and officials are critical of Tsvangirai and his advisors for entering into the talks.

¶8. (C) Both factions have told us they intend--at long last--to form an electoral coalition which would field one candidate for president, and one candidate for parliamentary and local council seats. In fact, presidents Tsvangirai and Arthur Mutambara and secretary generals Welshman Ncube and Tendai Biti met together this week, and further discussions are scheduled by party standing committees next week in South Africa. Ncube made the point to us, however, that with the increase in the size of Parliament, the MDC would now have to select candidates to run for 210 seats in the House of Assembly (up from 120) and for 60 Senate seats (up from 50). Additionally, there are several thousand seats in local councils. Ncube believed the selection of candidates, given a March election date, would be a difficult, if not impossible, task.

¶9. (C) Finances continue to be a problem. In a diplomatic briefing several weeks ago, the MDC stated it would need US\$10 million to run a country-wide campaigning. Money has not been forthcoming. Tsvangirai told the Ambassador last week that the MDC is broke. While the MDC has begun to hold some rallies, additional resources are necessary to campaign, particularly in Mashonaland which has always been the base of ZANU-PF support.

¶10. (C) The new electoral act provides for independent examination of the voters' roll, which the Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network (ZESN) believes contains numerous inaccuracies. We're not aware of anybody as of yet undertaking a comprehensive examination which would obviously take some time. (Note: ZESN has plans to do a partial audit with USAID support. End Note.) Voter registration, which the new draft constitution transfers to the Zimbabwe

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Electoral Commission (ZEC), remains in the hands of the partisan and corrupt Registrar. Ncube told us that this will result in the disenfranchisement of numerous voters, especially among the young. Additionally, the current ZEC, widely thought to be biased in favor of the GOZ, is conducting delimitation to draw up new constituencies in light of the increase in the size of Parliament. The delimitation exercise, not yet completed and made public, is expected to combine a number of urban constituencies with newly-created rural constituencies to dilute constituencies now held by the MDC.

¶11. (C) The MDC has told us that the level of political violence instigated by ZANU-PF has lessened, although political intimidation continues. The MDC and civil society have not tested the political environment by attempting to hold rallies in ZANU-PF areas. To get a sense of pre-election political space, or lack thereof, monitors will be necessary well in advance of the election. The GOZ has taken the position that monitors must be invited by the MFA, and Mugabe has stated that only "friendly" monitors will be invited. The draft SADC agreement contains a provision for international monitors, but assuming there is no overall agreement, this provision will not come into play. At this point, it appears there will be regional monitors for the election itself, but no monitors for the crucial period beginning now and including the immediate run-up to the election.

To Contest or Not to Contest--A Hobson's Choice

¶12. (C) Given the state of the MDC, the electoral environment, and, importantly, the short period to March elections, most MDC officials with whom we have spoken do not believe the MDC can win the presidential election. Discussion is taking place as to whether to boycott the election.

¶13. (C) Ncube told us that the executive council of his faction has voted to participate in the election. Supporters of this position, according to Ncube, believe that a boycott could result in a dying-off of the party and a void that would be filled by others. Parliamentarians would lose their offices and attendant perquisites, including remuneration, vehicles, and fuel. Ncube said he himself supports a boycott. With little chance to win, participation would serve primarily to legitimize a Mugabe victory.

¶14. (C) Officials in the Tsvangirai faction told us that a decision has not yet been taken. Spokesman Nelson Chamisa told us that many of Tsvangirai's advisors are leaning toward a boycott, but that parliamentarians in the faction, who represent an important base, are in favor of participation.

¶15. (C) Comment. The MDC at this moment has two bad choices. Participation runs the risk of legitimizing Mugabe; a boycott would result in a one-party state and a diminution of relevance of the MDC.

16 (C) Comment Continued. We strongly suspect the MDC will ultimately decide to participate in elections. Threat of a boycott is intended to exert pressure on SADC to wring concessions from ZANU-PF on an election date. In the event of an actual boycott, it would be more difficult to allege an unfair election than if the MDC campaigned and could point to specific examples of ZANU-PF conduct resulting in an unlevel electoral playing field. Mugabe would claim that ZANU-PF participated in negotiations in good faith, that his party compromised on such issues as AIPPA and POSA, and that the MDC had declined to participate because it realized it could

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not win. As noted, a boycott would also allow Mugabe to realize his long-sought goal of a one-party state while at the same time the MDC diminished in importance. MDC participation runs the risk of legitimizing a ZANU-PF win, but parliamentarians would keep their jobs and the MDC would maintain a platform in Parliament. End Comment.

A Third Way

¶17. (C) Ibbo Mandaza (a longtime ZANU-PF member who is a former minister and a former adviser to Mugabe) and Jonathan Moyo (a former ZANU-PF member, who is also a former minister and former adviser to Mugabe) are both involved in efforts to recruit Simba Makoni to establish a "third way" movement.

¶18. (C) Mandaza told us two weeks ago that his plan was to have Makoni head a splinter ZANU-PF faction to challenge Mugabe. He hoped to win provincial party support, primarily from the Mujuru faction with which he and Makoni are affiliated, to demonstrate to Mugabe that there was substantial opposition to him within the party and convince him to stand down for the elections. Failing that, he would hope to have the splinter group contest the election against ZANU-PF, perhaps as part of a broader coalition. Mandaza, who has been one of the only ZANU-PF members in Zimbabwe openly critical of Mugabe, told us he wants to get rid of Mugabe but keep ZANU-PF and its structures in tact.

¶19. (C) Moyo, who has been in contact with Mugabe, related to us that his idea was a broad-based coalition, comprised of break-off elements of ZANU-PF (presumably the Mujuru faction) and the MDC. Makoni would lead this coalition. Moyo is trying to cast a wider net than Mandaza; he has strategized with Nkosana Moyo (no relation), a well-respected former international trade minister who is now a London businessman. Jonathan Moyo, who is the only independent member of Parliament, has talked with numerous ZANU-PF and MDC parliamentarians.

¶20. (C) Consideration of a "third way" is not a secret. The Financial Gazette carried a front-page article on Jan 3. On Saturday, George Charamba, Mugabe's spokesperson who writes under the name of Nathaniel Manheru, belittled Mandaza and his plans to challenge Mugabe in his regular column. As a result, according to Moyo, a number of potential supporters of a third way are getting cold feet. However, on January 11, the Independent reported that Mandaza and Makoni will publicly roll out their plan and announce formation of the splinter ZANU-PF party next week. Moyo told us that he, Mandaza, Nkosana Moyo, and possibly Makoni planned to meet in South African January 12.

¶21. (C) Comment: There are several keys to a "third way" challenge. First is the participation of Makoni. Makoni, is a member of the ZANU-PF politburo, is well-respected throughout Zimbabwe, is considered relatively clean, and has good ties with the international community. Affiliated with the Mujuru faction, he has criticized ZANU-PF from within and non-publicly. But he has until now declined to exercise a leadership role to oppose Mugabe. Mandaza claimed to us that within the last several weeks, Makoni has said he would consider leading opposition to Mugabe; at the moment he is "consulting" and considering his options.

¶22. (C) Comment continued: The second key is the support of the Mujuru faction. Makoni has no constituency of his own and he probably could not be effective, particularly in an intraparty struggle, without the Mujuru faction. For their part, the Mujurus failed in December to stop Mugabe from obtaining the ZANU-PF nomination, and it is unclear they

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would be willing to challenge Mugabe openly in a battle they might not win, in the process exposing themselves to an assault by Mugabe on their huge business interests. The Mujurus are corrupt and Mugabe, who reportedly has dossiers on the faction and its interests, could make things difficult for them should they publicly oppose him.

¶23. (C) Comment continued: With Mugabe's control of security and intelligence elements of ZANU-PF and with a substantial following in ZANU-PF outside of the Mujuru faction, it is unlikely an internal challenge, as envisaged by Mandaza can succeed. More realistic is a broadbased coalition with the Mujuru faction and Makoni joining with the MDC. The third key, then, in addition to willingness on the part of the Mujuru faction and Makoni, is an accommodation with the MDC. MDC officials with whom we have spoken are skeptical of the plan. They doubt Makoni has the courage to assert a leadership role and that the Mujurus would leave the party. And they're not sure a modus vivendi could be worked out between Makoni and Tsvangirai. Tsvangirai told the Ambassador he would not step aside for Makoni. End Comment.

Comment--The Road Ahead

¶24. (C) A broadbased coalition, unlikely to be formed (but still a possibility), is the best hope to defeat Mugabe. Given the MDC's weaknesses, an early election date, and an unlevel playing field, the MDC by itself is unlikely to prevail in an election. Reflective of this, Biti and Ncube both told us they expect this year to be worse than last.

¶25. (C) Mugabe's reelection in March is likely. He may then try to create a government of national unity by inviting some MDC members into his cabinet. The betting is that he will try to stay in office until at least early 2009 when the ZANU-PF Congress will either reelect him as first secretary or elect a new leader. At this point, the best hope may be for the unexpected. Mugabe is old and reportedly has cancer. And as the economy worsens, infrastructure deteriorates, and hardship increases, opposition may coalesce in ways that are not now apparent.

